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**The Iowa Blind History Archive  
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project  
Interview with [Name]  
Conducted by [Name]  
[Date]  
Transcribed by [Name]**

**NOTE: Any text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.**

**Michael L. Manahl, 51, Des Moines, IA  
Karen Keninger  
524 Fourth Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50309  
10/02/2010**

**Karen Keninger: The recorder is now on, and it's just laying here on the table between us. And, the first thing that I want to do is announce that I am Karen Keninger, and we**

**are recording at the Iowa Department for the Blind. This is Mike Manahl and I am recording. This is October 2, 2010.**

**Michael Manahl: October 2, 2010, 14:30.**

**Keninger: And, I want to read this following thing to you so that you're real clear on what we're doing.**

**Manahl: Okay.**

**Keninger: All the stories submitted to the project will become a part of the history of blindness collection owned by the Iowa Department for the Blind. Submitting your story you are acknowledging that your story is a gift transferred to the Iowa Department for the Blind with legal title and all literary property rights. It will be granting to the Iowa Department for the Blind an unrestricted license to use your recording or your story and all the information it contains in any manner that the Department for the Blind may wish to use it for as long as the Iowa Department for the Blind may wish to use it. Okay. And, do you agree to have your story recorded?**

**Manahl: I agree.**

**Keninger: Okay, then if you would please tell me your name.**

**Manahl: Michael L. Manahl.**

**Keninger: Spell Manahl for me.**

**Manahl: M-a-n-a-h-l.**

**Keninger: Okay, Mike, and what is your age?**

**Manahl: Chronological age is 51.**

**Keninger: And, what is your address?**

**Manahl: 1519 Grand Avenue, Apartment 406, Des Moines, Iowa 50309.**

**Keninger: All right, excellent. And Mike, what would you like to talk about today?**

**Manahl: Well, I'd like to talk about the Orientation Center. My Braille and keyboarding teacher at that time was Cynthia Qloud. And, she was having computer problems and she button-holed me one morning and says, "Manahl, I got a project for you." I said, "What's that?" And, she goes...she goes, "You remember how you told me how to fix my computer problem when I was trying to install JAWS?" I said, "Yeah." She goes, "We would like to go on a field trip out to my place and you help me with that computer problem. And, she goes, "I checked with Sandy; she's Okayed it." So, up to that point, I didn't believe in my guts that a blind person could function, you know, as a regular Joe or Jane Public. Until I got to Cynthia's house and she gave us a little...there was another student with me at the time...and she gave us another, a little mini-tour. And, we went up to her computer area, while the other student played with her two cats and her dog. I interspersed some questions with what we were doing with the computer. And, she told me a little bit about the neighborhood that she lived**

**in. It was a neighborhood not unlike what I grew up in; kids, families, that kind of thing. Up until we walked into that house, I didn't believe in my gut that a blind person could function as a normal member of society. But, when we walked out of that house, back to the bus stop, I came to believe it, because I saw the evidence for myself.**

**Keninger: Okay, excellent.**

**Manahl: And, that for me was the turning point in my own mind as far as internalizing that a blind guy could be just as normal as anybody else, you know.**

**Keninger: That's an excellent, excellent story, Mike. Do you have any others that you'd like to share, since we've probably got another 10 minutes or so?**

**Manahl: Well, it happened, it happened a couple of months ago. Now, I have a friend in the building. He's a priest now, or a pastor or whatever they call it, a non-denominational chaplain. He's a former marine, and I think that may be why he and I get along so well. He was taking me home one time and I was tellin' him a story. Not, the kind of story I'd tell in front of a lady, okay.**

**Keninger: Okay.**

**Manahl: A dirty story. And, I got halfway through the story and I remembered, and I looked at him and I said, "Oh crap, I forgot you were a priest. He looked at me and he goes, "I forgot you were blind." I looked at him and I said, "Huh?" He said, "I forgot you were blind." And, I said, "What's that**

**suppose to mean?” He goes, “You remind me of half the guys I served in the corps with.” You know, blindness wasn’t the issue.**

**Keninger: Sure.**

**Manahl: You know, whenever we go anywhere I don’t ask him to do anything. For example, once a month I have him take me to the grocery store. And, I do what I always do. I go up to Customer Service, and I request to borrow a clerk and a cart. And, I’m in and out in less than a half hour with a month’s worth of groceries. I know what I want; I just don’t know where it is.**

**You know, and that’s basically how I do things, you know, and that’s how I do it. His name’s Rev. Ron, and but he’s a former Gunnery Sergeant, so I’ve just gotten in the habit of calling him Gunny. So, I says, “Gunny, it’s just a matter of improvise and adapt, and when you do those two things, you overcome the problem.” Then he starts laughin’, and I looked at him and I said, “What’s so funny?” He says, “That’s the motto in the corps.” I said, “What’s the motto?” “Improvise, adapt and overcome.” I said, “Well, when I was a kid, I learned that from the time I was old enough to understand the English language.” You know, you take what you got and you work with it, you know; simple. It sounds simpler than it actually is.**

**Keninger: How so?**

**Manahl: Well, the implementation is hard, but if you do it enough, it becomes second nature, you know.**

**Keninger: Okay.**

**Manahl: And, it doesn't matter what kind of situation it is. For example, I really want to go over to that sale at the fair grounds, but I don't have time to do it today, but I can do it tomorrow, and I have one of two...I already called Larry Sidwell, my old travel teacher, and I got detailed directions from the gate at East 30<sup>th</sup> and Grand to the 4H Building. Now, I've dealt with Larry before. I've dealt with him for years. He's great with directions. The man's got a built-in GPS in his head, you know. You can't get lost with Larry Sidwell. Believe me, I tried. If you pay attention to his directions and execute them exactly, then you won't get lost, you know.**

**Keninger: Okay.**

**Manahl: I really want to go to that thing tomorrow, and I mean to go, you know. So, tonight's gonna be an early night. Tomorrow I'm gonna be on the road out the door by 11:30 at the latest, because this thing opens at 1:00. That sale over at the fair grounds, you know.**

**Keninger: Sure.**

**Manahl: I want to go check it out, so I'm taking a backpack, a pocket full of quarters, a pocket compass, a cell phone, and an extra battery. For my cell phone, you know. And, basically that's just how I do things, when I need to know something.**

**Okay, for example, I've been a client of the Department for quite a while now, and Brenda Criswell called me a while**

**back and told me she had a job lead a few months back. She gave me the location. So, I said I need three things. I need the GPS coordinates, I need the exact address, and I need a rough set of directions or the closest intersection to where I need to go. It turned out to be Bosselman's right across the highway from the front gate of Adventureland. And, I figured out how to mitigate the cost going back and forth. Instead of taking a cab either from the Department or from my home directly there, I leave at least two hours earlier than I need to and I take a bus part way. And, since the cab company has my cell phone number, they know when they see that number on their screen I'm a legitimate fair. But, I could be anywhere in the Des Moines area, and they know that from their own experience. So, I just call them up and they say, "Where you callin' from today, Mike?" And, I give 'em the address, and if they're not sure, I give 'em the exact directions to the address, and that mitigates the cost because it divides it up. It takes a little extra time, but it divides the cost from full cab fare, say 20-25 bucks one way, it might knock it down 10 or 15 if you take a bus part way. See?**

**Keninger: Sure.**

**Manahl: You know, that's life. It's an adventure. You'd be surprised the kind of people you meet out there. Some people with great questions, and some people with what might sound like stupid questions, and every mish-mash in between.**

**Keninger: Can you think of any of those people in particular?**

**Manahl:** Okay. Ten years ago I was on a bus comin' home from somewhere. I get on what the bus driver tells me is the #1. Instead of turning left onto Grand from 12<sup>th</sup> like he's suppose to, or 10<sup>th</sup> like he's suppose to, he goes straight up 10<sup>th</sup>. And, I knew something was wrong when I felt the slant from the hill. I said, "Where you goin'?" He said, "Oh, crap, I thought I was on the #4." I said, "You just told me you were on the #1." So, this was 10 years ago. I gave him detailed directions to get from 10<sup>th</sup> and Woodland to get back down on to Grand. That was 10 years ago, and I haven't let him live it down since, you know. And, he goes, "The blind guy had to get me back on track." Well, here's why the blind guy got you back on track, because he got great travel training from the Department.

**Keninger:** Okay.

**Manahl:** You know. And, like I say, that was 10 years ago and I ain't let him live it down since. I nicknamed him Wrong Way, you know. His name is Kyle, you probably talked to him. The guy's from Canada and has that Canadian style accent. Anything else you want to know?

**Keninger:** Anything in your background, you know, from growing up, or anything that's worth tellin'?

**Manahl:** Well, I think I got my attitude from my dad. He was a cop. Dad's attitude came in the form of these short statements: If you panic you're dead; leave your personal problems at the door of the stationhouse; there are three sides to every story, the first party, the second party, and



**the truth is always somewhere in the middle. You know, these cute little sayings.**

**Keninger: Sure.**

**Manahl: Can't didn't do nothin', or can't never did, and I'm not gonna tell you what he said. Let's see...**

**Keninger: So, how did that affect you? Were you blind as a child?**

**Manahl: Yeah.**

**Keninger: And so, how did that affect you then growing up?**

**Manahl: Oh, I got real mean real fast, having to deal with other people. In the eighth grade, three guys ganged up on me. And, I was fine until the pain hit from the blows. And, once the pain hit, it's like I was seeing green, night vision green. Other people talk about seeing red, but it actually looked like night vision green to me. I aimed a kick at the first guy that was the closest; the last one to punch me in the mouth. I missed and got the teacher.**

**Keninger: Oops.**

**Manahl: Yeah, tell me about it. I found out three days later that I'd broken her foot in seven places.**

**Keninger: Why were they beating you up?**

**Manahl:** Well, they thought they could get away with it, you know, a blind guy. He can't testify; he's legally blind. They ain't gonna take his testimony anyway. Well, after that, they stayed away from my feet, you know. I found I could execute a kick that could break bones. And, I think I would have been expelled from school if I hadn't turned around, noticed the teacher on the ground, and I had to ask her three times, "which foot." But, the third time she said, "The right foot." So, I moved around to her right side, wrapped her right arm around my neck, and with my left hand, I got a death grip on her wrist, and I said, "Now, stand on your left foot, your right side is going to be leaning on me." And, I squatted right down next to her and wrapped her arm around my neck, and stood up. I said, "Okay, we're going to work our way down the hall. We're going to do this one step at a time." First, is down the hall to the foot of the stairway, and it took me about 10 minutes, because the hell of it was the office was on the top floor of the junior high school. No elevator, okay?

**Keninger:** All right.

**Manahl:** Thirty steps from our basement classroom to the level where I could get her to the office on that level. It took us a full 10 minutes from the classroom to the office. And, six or seven minutes to get upstairs because it had to be done one step at a time, and she was in pain; I could tell it. You know, I don't know if you've noticed, but when someone's in significant pain, the scent of their body changes. It becomes a sour smell.

**Keninger:** Yeah.

**Manahl: You know, their sweat. It, it changes. And, that's not blindness, that's just observation.**

**Keninger: Sure.**

**Manahl: Any other questions? Anyhow, I got her down the hall to the office. I didn't even stop at the office, I headed past that to the nurse's office, and as I went by the office I yelled, "Get the nurse down here. I got an injury." And so, I walked her into the office, sat her down on a hammock, pulled her feet up onto the thing and she looked at me and said, "Mike, go on back to the classroom." Okay. When I got back to the classroom those three dirt bags that had been beatin' me up are slappin' me on the shoulder goin', "You got the teacher." I was so mad, because I didn't think it was funny, you know, and I still don't. I wasn't aiming for her at all.**

**Keninger: No.**

**Manahl: She was just an innocent party, who got in the line of fire. And, years later I thought if I had had blindness skills, I would have been able to better target what I was aiming at, you know.**

**Keninger: Did you have a lot of trouble like that when you were in school?**

**Manahl: Oh God yes, God yes. You know the old saying "Whatever doesn't kill ya makes ya stronger?" It made me stronger, it made me more mentally aware, and it made me**

more suspicious of sighted people in general, you know. Whenever somebody does something nice for me, my cop sense kicks in, and I'm thinkin', okay what's this guy want in return? You know. And, whenever the Department... The Department's been nothin' but great to me. Y'all been great from day one! And, outside some from my own family, I'd actually have to say I trust more people in the Department hooked up with the IDB than I do the other people out there. Because you've proven your trust time and again, you know. You've presented evidence to me that gives me reason to trust ya, you know. Anything else?

**Keninger:** Not unless you can think of anything else you'd like to....

**Manahl:** Well, I can't think of...I could run about this all day, but we've only got 20 minutes, and you've got a whole lot more people to interview.

**Keninger:** Okay.

**Manahl:** In fact, Mary McGee, I think, has an appointment right after me. I just talked to her. We went out and had a smoke and we were talkin' about it.

**Keninger:** All right, well thanks, Mike.

**Manahl:** You bet, any other questions, you know where to find me.

**Keninger:** I do. All right, and thanks very much.

**Manahl: Thank you.**

**Keninger: All right.**

**15:14**

**(End of Recording)**

**Jo Ann Slayton**

**11/02/2010**